

CTE, Quality Workforce are Needed for Stronger American Businesses



By Roy Schroer, Assistant Vice-President of Human Resources at Union Pacific Railroad, North America's premier railroad franchise, covering 23 states across the western two-thirds of the United States.

Strengthening the Labor Pool

One of America's most successful and iconic companies, Union Pacific Railroad delivers the goods families and businesses use daily. Celebrating our 150th anniversary in 2012, we recognize that one of the most vital elements to our success is a quality workforce. The foundation of our workforce has been our ability to recruit top-tier students when they complete their education.

Union Pacific hires college graduates who possess the necessary skill sets to quickly become an asset to the company. The learning curve is limited for graduates who have the fundamental knowledge needed for their respective positions. However, we are experiencing a shortage of employees skilled in important trades and crafts taught in Career Technical Education (CTE).

Offer earlier opportunities

High school students – or even younger students – need more opportunities to learn the necessary trade skills to become the next generation of diesel mechanics, industrial engineers and electricians. Today, students complete high school and face one of two choices: go to college or start looking for a job. But how do we expect someone with a high school education and no

“If students had opportunities to learn about various jobs, schools could produce employee candidates who are better prepared to succeed.”

workforce experience to compete in the job market? It is likely that students with just a high school degree or less will only be able to obtain a low-skilled, and thus low-wage position, to support themselves or their families.

Business and industry recognize that CTE can play a critical role in helping to maintain a pipeline of potential employees for businesses across the nation. CTE options are key to preparing our young students to learn skilled trades,

gain valuable work experience and discover what path is most suitable for them. These education options are beneficial to the future employees, help education systems achieve the goal of producing graduates who will be productive citizens, and will ultimately benefit employers as well.

Win-win solutions

Companies dedicate significant resources to recruiting, hiring and training new employees, however we experience loss when employees do not enjoy their new job or are not adequately prepared; they leave the position and company. If students had opportunities to learn about various jobs, trades and crafts during their formal education experience, schools could produce employee candidates who have explored their interests and are better prepared to enter the workforce and succeed. Collaboration between schools and businesses to develop quality CTE programs could address such issues.

For example, Union Pacific Railroad works with local schools through our Direction Recruitment Education and Mentoring (DREAM) program in which employees provide students with career, educational and social guidance. The mentoring program serves as a vehicle to develop students' self-esteem and confidence in their personal and career ambitions as they explore the business world.

Providing CTE options to students as early as possible will provide a new stream of job candidates who have a much better understanding of their desired career, which makes for happier, more productive and efficient employees, as well as a deeper and stronger workforce for American businesses. ●

